

failed to get widespread support from the Afghan people. There are many reasons for this, but there is one big one: corruption. And the billions upon billions of dollars that are pumped into the Afghan economy by U.S. taxpayers often never find their way to actually helping the people of that country. Too much of our aid has been syphoned off by local leaders and unintentionally we have helped establish a system of corruption that has become so pervasive and so predatory that people have, frankly, become less resistant to Taliban inroads.

Without a functioning police force, local Governors establish their own militias, and the mafia-style system that has developed has led to this vast drug trafficking network, fueled by corruption and that poppy production I talked about.

This has distorted Afghanistan's economy, and it has, frankly, neutralized a lot of our economic aid. And yet the United States often, over the course of the last 20 years, has tolerated these warlords, these drug traffickers, and these corrupt defense contractors inside Afghanistan because we consider the enemy of our enemy to be our friend. Our entire mission there has often been built on a self-defeating strategy.

In fact, what began as a vital mission to eliminate the threat of those who attacked us on September 11 has now, in some ways, become a symbol of nearly everything that is wrong with American foreign policy. Our armed presence in Afghanistan epitomizes this hubristic myth around the power of U.S. troops abroad; that they can completely dismantle terrorist networks by force, install and cultivate a stable democratic government, and eliminate rampant corruption and illegal drug cultivation.

Two decades and nearly \$2 trillion dollars of spending later, we have seen the limitations of those fantastical assumptions. Our generals have offered PowerPoint presentation after PowerPoint presentation on how this time it is going to be different, but it never is because the failure really isn't in the execution. The failure has been in the design.

A few thousand troops—and that is what we have there today—cannot deliver security and political stability to a complex, multicultural, multilingual nation, long resistant to centralized rule, on the other side of the world.

We were right to pursue the al-Qaida terrorists who attacked us on September 11, but that mission is completed, and it is time to face facts about the limitations of American military power in Afghanistan and bring our troops home.

Now, let's be clear, al-Qaida still wants to harm the United States, but the threat that they pose today is nowhere near what it was 20 years ago when they attacked our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, bombed the USS *Cole*, and killed thousands of Americans on September 11.

Intelligence estimates tell us that in Afghanistan, there may be only 200, 300, maybe 400 al-Qaida members total. The organization is no longer capable of planning large-scale attacks against the United States. That is what our intelligence estimates tell us. And, frankly, there are far more al-Qaida members today in other countries, like Yemen, for instance. Does that mean that we should also plant huge numbers of U.S. troops in every place where there are security vacuums to eliminate the terrorist threat from those countries? Of course not.

After two decades of the War on Terror, we have made a ton of mistakes, but we have also gotten a lot better in terms of our intelligence capabilities and our ability to strike against a terrorist threat absent a huge in-country presence. Why not apply that lesson learned to Afghanistan?

To their credit, the Trump administration was right to finally call it like it is and state that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan couldn't and shouldn't continue forever.

But as usual, the Trump team didn't put in the work to ensure that we could do this responsibly by their deadline of May 1. So a 4-month extension, announced by President Biden, will give us the space needed, not to magically accomplish what we haven't been able to do in 20 years but to realistically chart out the operational plans for pulling out the 2,500 troops whom we still have there.

Now, finally, I want to be honest. When we withdraw, there is a real possibility the situation in Afghanistan is going to get worse. It is likely that fighting between the Afghan Government and the Taliban escalates. At that point, either the Afghan Government will have to lead the fight without the crutch of American support or the government could collapse.

But this is the key point: That has been the dynamic for the last 15 years, and it is going to continue to be the dynamic for the next 15 years. It wouldn't be any different if we had stayed for another 5 years, another 20 years, or another year. There is simply no evidence to suggest that things are going to change. After 20 years and billions of dollars of investment in the Afghan Government, the onus has to be on them to get their act together and to earn the support of the people.

And one last point, being in Afghanistan is a choice, a choice to not focus on other theaters that present more serious threats to international norms, global stability, and American security. It bogs America down having 2,500 troops there and thousands more contractors and billions of dollars. It bogs us down in a theater that, frankly, just matters less to us today than it did years ago.

Just within the last few days, China has leveled new threats to the territorial integrity of its neighbors; Russia is amassing thousands of troops on the border of Ukraine; and there are new

worries about a potential attack on NATO member states.

And remember, counterterrorism officials and our daily newsfeed remind us that the most serious threat to America today is actually not from foreign terrorist organizations but from domestic groups.

We spend more money than any other nation in the world on security, but even given the gargantuan size of our global military footprint, we cannot and should not be everywhere. We need to make choices every now and again, and right now it is fantasy, not reality, that undergirds an argument to stay in Afghanistan for another 10 years or 5 years or even another year.

A big part of being President is making tough choices, and today President Biden has made the right one to end this war.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the new power dynamic in Washington has brought about a frenzy of proposed institutional changes by our friends across the aisle.

The American people elected a Democratic President, that is true; they reduced the Democratic majority in the House; and elected a 50-50 Senate. In all of Congress, there are seven more Democrats than Republicans. That is all—7 out of 535 Members.

Despite these tight margins, our friends on the other side have tried to characterize this new power dynamic as a mandate, and they have floated a tsunami of rule changes to go along with it. First came the push to eliminate the filibuster.

Just a few years ago, the idea of such a radical change terrified our Democratic colleagues. We certainly didn't do it when we were in a position to do it, notwithstanding the encouragement of President Trump.

When Republicans held control of the Senate, the House, and the White House, as our Democratic colleagues do now, our friends on the other side of the aisle feared the filibuster would come tumbling down. They were so concerned, in fact, that 33 of our colleagues signed on to a letter insisting that the filibuster be preserved. Leader MCCONNELL agreed. He never wavered to pressure from anyone, even the President, to eliminate the filibuster. He has been around this Chamber and this Senate a long time, and he knows that what goes around comes around.

As the leader correctly noted, Democrats didn't just spend the last 4 years supporting the filibuster, they took every advantage of the opportunity for

the minority to stop legislation they disagreed with. They spent 4 years using it.

Our Democratic colleagues employed the filibuster to kill quite a number of Republican bills on pandemic relief, government funding, pro-life legislation, police reform, and the list goes on and on.

Despite the fact our friends on the other side of the aisle consistently praised and utilized the filibuster in recent years, now, after the election of 2020, they seem to have reversed course. Since the political tides have changed, so, too, have the views of many Senate Democrats.

In recent months, one of our colleagues referred to the filibuster as making a mockery of American democracy.

I happen to remember at John Lewis's funeral—the great civil rights icon—even former President Obama called it a “relic of Jim Crow,” arguably giving permission to Democrats to call the filibuster a racist obstacle to making progress in the country.

Another Senator said that the filibuster had deep roots in racism, even though last summer Democrats used this tool to block an anti-lynching bill.

The entire debate has ballooned beyond reason, and the past few months have been a game of “will they or won't they” when it comes to eliminating the filibuster.

You know, the filibuster has very sound origins. It forces us to do what I think the American people would want us to do anyway, and that is to work together. It forces us to do that. And building consensus is hard, as we all know.

Well, we now have confirmation that our Democratic colleagues do not have the votes. Last week, Senator MANCHIN of West Virginia took to the pages of the Washington Post and said he will not support eliminating or weakening the filibuster. He has been here long enough to know that what you can do in the majority will have consequences when you are in the minority, as you eventually will be if you are here long enough.

I was appreciative of what Senator MANCHIN said in those pages. I am sure it wasn't easy. I am sure there is a lot of pressure on him to be expedient, to jam things through on a partisan basis, and I appreciate his willingness to stand up.

I agree with the Senator from Arizona, who said: We don't have a rule problem. We have a people problem. We have a behavior problem.

We need to restore bipartisan cooperation. There is no chance that will happen if everything in the Senate is jammed through along party lines.

The filibuster is designed to protect our country from the continual change of who is in the majority and who is in the minority and to provide the American people a chance to plan their lives. If anything that can be done in one election can be undone in the next election, that is an invitation to chaos.

Unfortunately, the list of proposed institutional changes doesn't end with the filibuster. Over the last few years, our friends on the other side of the aisle have also set their sights on the Supreme Court.

We all remember the day a sitting Member of this body threatened two Supreme Court Justices by name. As the Justices were debating a case, the current majority leader said, on the steps of the Supreme Court:

You have released the whirlwind and you will pay the price.

Well, I think he realized the error in making that statement because he then followed up with—well, this isn't the point where he realized the error because he doubled down on it. He said:

You won't know what hit you if you go forward with these awful decisions.

Well, we know this wasn't an isolated incident. It is true that the majority leader tried to walk back his words later after he realized how intemperate and inappropriate they were when directed at two sitting members of the U.S. Supreme Court.

We don't have to remember too far in the past to know how the words we speak here in Congress and as public officials—the impact they can have on other people's minds and perceptions, especially those who are not particularly stable in the first place.

Well, several of our Democratic colleagues filed an amicus brief in which they threatened the Supreme Court with retribution unless they got the outcome that they wanted.

Thank goodness our Founders designed the Federal Government with three separate but equal branches. Through this system of checks and balances, they sought to prevent any one branch of government from forcing its will on the other two. Standing up on the steps of the Supreme Court and issuing threats to the Justices that they must do what you want or else is certainly not consistent with the Founders' vision.

Let me be clear. An independent judiciary is the crown jewel of our Constitution and our constitutional Republic—an independent judiciary. In the words of Supreme Court Justice John Roberts, “We should celebrate our strong and independent judiciary as a source of national unity and stability.” But now, even this hallowed institution is being attacked by our Democratic colleagues unless they get the result they want. They are trying to intimidate the members of the Supreme Court.

Then there is the most recent discussion—threat, really—about packing the Supreme Court with additional members. The push to pack the Supreme Court has been a mainstay of the far left for years, but it has now made its way into the Biden administration.

Previously, throughout his campaign, President Biden refused to weigh in on this topic. He knew how explosive this was, this threat to pack the Court, to make it a political body, to elimi-

nate its role as an independent judiciary. Well, he refused to weigh in on it during the campaign, and I have no doubt this was an important strategic decision. He realized how offensive that would be to the voters he hoped would vote for him in 2020. A poll last fall found that less than one-third of Americans support increasing the number of Justices on the Supreme Court.

The President previously said he is “not a fan of court packing.” In fact, he called it a “bonehead idea.” He referred to President Roosevelt's proposal to pack the Court as a “terrible, terrible mistake.” But now President Biden has appeared to have embraced this “bonehead idea” and this “terrible, terrible mistake” that he condemned previously.

The first step was last week when he created a Commission to examine adding members to the Supreme Court of the United States above the current nine. This decision and announcement came despite the fact that Justices on both sides appointed by Presidents on both sides of the aisle have affirmed the integrity of the Supreme Court with just nine members.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was an icon for the liberals on the Court and many people in America, said: “Nine seems to be a good number.”

Just last week, Justice Breyer said that the Court's authority depends on “a trust that the court is guided by legal principle, not politics.” He said that these types of changes would erode the trust that the American people must have in the highest Court in the land.

The American people simply won't have faith in an independent judiciary if one side is adding names to the roster so that they can game the outcome. They need to get involved in the legislative process if they want to make policy, not try to make politics through the judiciary, through the Supreme Court.

So I would urge President Biden to heed his own words that he delivered with such conviction during his time on the Judiciary Committee when he said that President Roosevelt's decision “put in question for an entire decade the independence of the most significant body . . . in this country.”

Well, unfortunately, the power grab doesn't stop there. The single biggest legislative goal of our friends on the other side of the aisle is an attempted takeover of State election laws. That is in spite of the fact that article I of the Constitution explicitly gives the States the power to regulate the “times, places, and manner of holding elections.” Yet this massive bill creates a one-size-fits-all mandate that every State must follow. It preempts State law, but I doubt it would ultimately be held up as constitutional because of the explicit guarantee that the States will regulate the time, manner, and place of holding elections.

But there are also other changes that our Democratic colleagues—where they

seek to reap the benefit of a politicized Supreme Court and Federal Agencies.

In this instance, the Federal Election Commission has six members, three from each party—intentionally designed to be a tie vote if they vote along party lines, to protect the Commission from partisan politics.

We have learned that a fair and balanced Commission, which has been the standard for many years, isn't the gold standard for Democrats when they are in control of Congress and the White House. The election takeover bill introduced by our Democratic colleagues would remove one of the seats held by a Republican member of the Commission and turn the FEC into a partisan body. No more equal representation. No more consensus building. Why bother with that if you can steamroll an agenda with no opposition?

Then there is the taxpayer funding of political campaigns. Instead of candidates working to gain the support, the vote, the activism and contributions from their preferred candidate, our Democratic colleagues want the taxpayer to pay for those campaigns. And it is not even a dollar-for-dollar match. The American taxpayer would pay \$6 dollars for every \$1 dollar that was donated to a candidate. That means if someone donates 200 bucks to their preferred candidate, the Federal Government would match that with up to \$1,200. Those are taxpayer dollars. That is money coming out of your pocket whether you support that candidate's policies or not.

On top of that, there are campaign vouchers proposed which would provide eligible voters with a \$25 voucher to donate to the campaign of their choosing. I would rather this funding support the people and organizations that really need it: crime victims, unaccompanied children on our border, domestic violence, shelters. There are far more urgent needs for this money than our Democratic colleagues' campaign account.

Of course, this effort comes at a time when the House Democrats are already trying to overturn the results of an Iowa congressional election in order to boost their own numbers.

This confluence of institutional changes isn't about repairing a broken system; it is revolutionary. It is a revolution. You can't win every case before the Supreme Court? Well, just add some more liberal Justices. You can't build support for legislation? Well, eliminate the filibuster and the need to build consensus and to work together on a bipartisan basis. You can't win an election? Overturn the results and secure government funding or taxpayer funding for your candidates. And to cement these changes for a generation, better throw in a complete partisan takeover of our election laws.

Our Democratic friends are taking the saying "If you can't win the game, change the rules" to a whole new level. This has been branded by propaganda, really, as a way to fix the system. Well,

the system is not broken, and to the extent it needs reforms, it can be reformed at the State level, where the Constitution provides the authority for the States to run their elections.

Well, I think it is important for the American people to understand exactly what is going on here. You can't understand what is going on here by just reading social media or watching cable news shows that reinforce your own bias. Unfortunately, our news these days seems to be like ships passing in the night, and people pick the channel that reaffirms their previous bias and doesn't challenge people with ideas that perhaps they are not familiar with or don't agree with, which is the way we ought to be dealing with each other. It is OK to disagree, but we ought to engage each other in a civil and respectful manner and to work those out in the crucible of our democracy known as the Congress.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Ohio.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S LETTER FROM
THE BIRMINGHAM JAIL

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, it is an honor to join my colleagues of both parties, starting with Reverend Warnock and five—two other Democrats and three other Republicans on the floor today to read one of the great pieces of writing of the 20th century, Dr. King's letter from the Birmingham jail.

I thank Senator WARNOCK and Senators MURKOWSKI, Republican from Alaska; TOOMEY, Republican from Pennsylvania; PADILLA, our new colleague from California, a Democrat; Senator CORTEZ MASTO, in her fifth year in the Senate, a Democrat from the Presiding Officer's home State of Nevada; and Senator CASSIDY from Louisiana, a Republican. They will be joining me today for this annual tradition.

Our former colleague, Doug Jones from Alabama, began this reading 3 years ago. I joined him on the floor. He asked me last year after his election to carry on this tradition in the years ahead. I am honored to take that responsibility because Dr. King's words are as powerful, as beautiful, and as relevant as ever.

One of many, many, many incisive things that Dr. King said was that we live in a 10-day world where people forget about public events 10 days later. Not so for him, not so for his words, and certainly not so from the letter from the Birmingham jail.

Twelve years after Dr. King's assassination, when Cesar Chavez was thrown in jail, Dr. King's widow, Coretta Scott King, said:

You cannot keep truth in . . . jail. . . . Truth and justice leap barriers, and in their own way, reach the conscience of the people.

She said that is what Dr. King said, were his words.

In April 1963, Dr. King was detained at the Birmingham jail for leading a series of peaceful protests and boy-

cotts. The goal was to put pressure on the business community to end discrimination in hiring for local jobs.

Some White ministers from Alabama had taken issues with his boycotts. They supported civil rights, they said. They told him to slow down, don't move too fast, and don't demand too much all at once. Dr. King, of course, as we know, rejected that premise.

That is what this letter is all about. It is about demanding justice now. We can't wait around and hope the problems in families' lives will solve themselves. It is up to all of us as citizens, as leaders, as members of our churches and our communities to get to work.

Dr. King made that point more eloquently and more persuasively, certainly, than I can, but we will read this note—we will read his words. Senator WARNOCK will begin, followed by Senator MURKOWSKI and four other Senators.

Senator WARNOCK.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. WARNOCK. Madam President, I want to thank my colleague, Senator BROWN, for bringing us together in this way, reading from a letter from a Birmingham jail by Dr. King, April 16, 1963. Dr. King writes:

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely."

Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my working ideas. If I sought to answer all of the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of a day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I will try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a non-violent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.